

1185765

Assurance visit

Information about this children's home

The home is part of a large private organisation. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four young people aged between eight and 17 years old who have social and emotional needs.

There is currently no permanent manager in post.

Visit dates: 14 to 15 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 18 February 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Sustained effectiveness

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We identified the following serious concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- Risk assessments do not contain all known information about children's risks and behaviours to help staff to use appropriate strategies to mitigate risk.
- The assessment of children's specific needs and compatibility with each other is poor. This means that the impact children may have on each other while living in the home is not adequately considered prior to new children arriving.
- The assessment of children's specific needs to the skills and experience of staff in the home is not sufficient. This means it is not clear how staff are experienced and equipped to work with children who come to live in the home.
- Staff have not intervened effectively so that children are not hurt by each other.
- Managers do not ensure that gaps in employment and the reasons staff have left previous employment are understood prior to staff starting work in the home. This means that managers do not have full information with which to ensure that they have made safe decisions about adults who work with children.
- As a result of these concerns, Ofsted has imposed a restriction on the accommodation of the home and issued a compliance notice in relation to the fitness of workers and recruitment practice.

The care of children

Children are not well protected from each other by staff and children are not always tolerant of each other's specific needs. This has led to one child being assaulted on several occasions and they have had their possessions broken. This does not safeguard children and makes them wary and worried.

During the period of social restriction due to Covid-19 children have been supported by staff to see their families and friends. This is because staff recognise the importance of children's relationships with key people in their lives.

Staff help children with their learning. They have secured a college placement for one child and encourage their aspiration. Staff show their obvious pride to children about their achievements and attendance at school, especially due to the restrictions that have been necessary over the last few months. Children relish this positive feedback from staff.

Children are encouraged to take part in positive activities both in and out of the home. This has been a focus for staff during the period of social restriction due to Covid-19. This helps staff to connect with children and develop their interests.

When children move on from the home, staff work hard to support them with their next steps. Staff have constructive and supportive conversations that help children develop and reassure them about their future. This is a strength of the home.

The safety of children

Managers have failed to complete risk assessments that take into account all known information about children. Areas such as sexual and criminal exploitation, going missing from the home and sexualised behaviour are not included in these assessments even when this is a known concern. This means that coherent strategies to manage children's risks are not available to staff.

Staff have not prevented children harming each other. For example, one child was punched in the face by another child two days after being hit by this child with a gaming handset. Staff did not learn from the first assault, so they could not predict the likelihood of future assaults, and did not put in place measures to prevent this recurring. This leaves children at risk of harm and potentially being criminalised.

Managers do not ensure effective care planning. Managers do not consider all information about children's known risks and behaviours when assessing how compatible children are to each other or the skills of the staff team. Staff do not have the required training and experience to manage some children who have moved into the home. This has led to children living in the home who are not receiving a level of care that is sufficiently well-matched to their individual needs.

Children whose needs mean they need to be supported on a one-to-one basis are not always supervised as required. This led on one occasion to a child being able to leave the home and expose themselves to a member of the public. This was a risk to his well-being and to him being criminalised. It is also concerning that staff were not aware he had left the home until a member of the public came to complain. In response to this, staff have undertaken work with children so that they understand the seriousness of this behaviour and this has not reoccurred.

Staff do not anticipate children going missing while in their care and two serious incidents when children went missing were avoidable. However, when children do go missing staff respond well and try to stay in touch with them to secure their safe return. Records of these incidents do not show staff learning or changes to their work as a result. This is a missed opportunity.

As a result of these concerns Ofsted reasonably believes that children placed at the home will be at risk of harm and has imposed a restriction on accommodation in the home. This is because Ofsted are not clear that the staff team would be able to meet children's needs well or protect them if there were more children in the home.

Leaders and managers

The interim manager, who is very new in post, has systems in place to support her oversight of the home. There is promise in this system and she is working hard, supported by the new responsible individual, to address concerns. However, the discrepancy about information in risk assessments and behaviour plans was not picked up using the monitoring arrangements. Managers' oversight of incidents has also not resulted in changes to practice to ensure that children are safe from each other.

Despite the shortfalls in practice, staff are committed to children. There are obvious tensions in how staff work together which has led to low morale and staff are leaving as a result. The lack of a consistent manager since the last full inspection has meant that staff are not directed in their work and practice does not consistently improve over time.

There are several vacancies and four staff have recently given their resignations. Interim arrangements ensure that sufficient staff are available to work in the home, but this means that children will not be supported by staff who know them well.

Recruitment in the home is not safe. Managers do not explore gaps in employment or why applicants have left previous roles working with children. This area is subject to a compliance notice as it has been a regulatory shortfall at the July 2019 full inspection and the February 2020 interim inspection.

Managers and leaders investigate complaints that children make about staff thoroughly. The right external agencies are informed but managers are slow to share their findings. This reduces external scrutiny. The new responsible individual is aware of this and is already looking at how this can be better managed as a priority.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff—</p>	<p>18/10/2020</p>

<p>assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child’s relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child;</p> <p>manage relationships between children to prevent them from harming each other.</p> <p>(Regulation 12 (1)(2)(a)(i)(iv))</p>	
<p>The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children’s home that—</p> <p>helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare.</p> <p>In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to—</p> <p>ensure that staff work as a team where appropriate;</p> <p>ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child;</p> <p>use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home.</p> <p>(Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b)(2)(b)(c)(h))</p>	18/10/2020
<p>The care planning standard is that children—</p> <p>receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home; and</p> <p>have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home.</p> <p>(Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular the home must ensure the needs of children coming to the home and children already in the home are well considered and whether placements are appropriate</p>	18/10/2020
<p>The registered provider must appoint a person to manage the children’s home if—</p> <p>there is no registered manager in respect of the home.</p>	18/10/2020

(Regulation 27 (1)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii)(2)(a)(b))	
<p>The registered person must recruit staff using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children’s safety.</p> <p>The registered person may only—</p> <p>employ an individual to work at the children’s home;</p> <p>if the individual satisfies the requirements in paragraph (3).</p> <p>The requirements are that—</p> <p>full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2.</p> <p>(Regulation 32 (1)(2)(a)(3)(d))*</p>	18/10/2020*

*This requirement is subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- Ensure that staff are familiar with the home’s policies on record keeping and understand the importance of careful, objective, and clear recording. (‘Guide to the children’s homes regulations including the quality standards’, page 62, paragraph 14.4)

Children’s home details

Unique reference number: 1185765

Registered provider: Horizon Care And Education Group Limited

Registered provider address: Venture House, Unit 12, Prospect Business Park, Longford Road, Cannock WS11 0LG

Responsible individual: Agata Dokszevicz

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Karol Keenan, Social Care Inspector
Dean Wilton, Social Care Inspector

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